

Kobakhidze Lays Out Political Agenda in Rustavi 2 Interview, Targets Opposition and Foreign Influence

By Liza Mchedlidze

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze appeared on the pro-government Rustavi 2 television channel on April 16, delivering a wide-ranging interview in which he touched on key domestic political issues and renewed his attacks on the opposition, civil society, and alleged foreign interference.

Looking ahead to Georgia's upcoming local elections in October, Kobakhidze expressed confidence in a sweeping Georgian Dream (GD) victory, regardless of whether opposition parties participate. "If they participate, they will be defeated badly, and if they don't participate, this will also be a defeat. For us, this [the opposition's participation] has no substantial meaning," he said.

Dismissing the idea that one-party control of local governance could undermine democratic norms, Kobakhidze instead targeted opposition groups, referring to the four parties that won seats in the last elections as "agents." He added, "I wish there were an opposition that wasn't [at the very least] a network of foreign agents. As soon as this spectrum vanishes, as soon as the spectrum of agents vanishes from the [Georgian] political space," a genuine opposition would "naturally" emerge.

Kobakhidze also addressed the ruling party's effort to formally



ban certain opposition parties, saying the process in the Constitutional Court would conclude by the end of the year. The move hinges on the final report from the GD-controlled parliamentary investigative commission probing alleged crimes by the United National Movement (UNM) and others.

The prime minister launched

a harsh rebuke of former Prime Minister and now opposition leader Giorgi Gakharia, who recently testified before the parliamentary commission investigating the events of "Gavrilov's Night" — the brutal June 20, 2019 crackdown on anti-Russian protests.

Kobakhidze said the GD leadership had initially agreed

Gakharia should resign after the violence, but foreign influence intervened. "The discussion took place after June 20, and in the end it was decided that Gakharia should have left his post... [But] there was a phone call from the 'deep state.' It was a [foreign] official, a high official, who called from abroad and said that his dismissal would not be feasible,"

he claimed. Gakharia, he argued, became prime minister under the "influence" of this external power, and "Georgia's sovereignty was limited" until he left the party in 2021.

Kobakhidze defended the work of the investigative commission, particularly its focus on the 2008

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Papuashvili Criticizes Germany's Sanctions Policy and Selective Enforcement

By Liza Mchedlidze

Shalva Papuashvili, the Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, has raised concerns about the way sanctions and visa restrictions are being used, arguing that they have become tools for political vendettas rather than a genuine commitment to upholding legal principles.

Papuashvili's comments came in response to a recent statement by Peter Fischer, the German Ambassador to Georgia. Fischer explained that sanctions were imposed to prevent human rights violators from entering Germany. In his Facebook post, Papuashvili questioned why the German government had not banned Zurab Adeishvili, a former Georgian official, from entering the country despite his involvement in multiple human rights abuses.

Papuashvili referred to Adeishvili as "one of the main architects of a system of torture and racketeering" in Georgia. He went on to point out that just months ago, Adeishvili visited Germany officially, meeting with of-

ficials as a representative of the Ukrainian government, and was even seen in the Bundestag. This, according to Papuashvili, is a contradiction of Germany's stance on human rights violators.

The Georgian Parliament Speaker listed several of Adeishvili's criminal convictions, including the kidnapping and torture of opposition politician Koba Davitashvili, the unlawful seizure of businesses and media outlets, and his attempt to bankrupt a bank. Despite these actions, Papuashvili argued, the German government allowed Adeishvili to enter the country, which he believes shows that sanctions and visa restrictions are being applied inconsistently.

"If Germany truly rejected human rights violators, they would not have hosted Adeishvili or allowed him into the country," Papuashvili wrote, stressing that this is a clear example of how sanctions have been politicized. He concluded by stating that such actions are far removed from the core European legal values of fairness and impartiality.



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August War with Russia. He reiterated the GD narrative blaming the conflict on the previous government: "It was Saakashvili's bloody regime, the agents! When agents start a war... when an illegitimate, criminal regime starts large-scale military operations, this cannot in any way mean that Georgia started the war."

He also weighed in on a recent controversial statement by commission chair Tea Tsulukiani regarding national hero Giorgi Antsukhelidze, who was tortured and executed by Russian forces after the war. While Tsulukiani claimed Antsukhelidze was "sacrificed for Saakashvili's PR campaign," Kobakhidze corrected her slightly, saying, "We don't need to create new heroes [who would be claimed by war]. We need heroes who serve their homeland not through sacrifice in war, but by contributing to the country's development."

On the 36th anniversary of the April 9, 1989 massacre, Kobakhidze stirred backlash by referring to the Soviet Union merely as a "foreign power" without directly naming Russia. Critics accused him of historical white-washing, but Kobakhidze doubled down: "Georgian liberals and liberals in general have a limited mind." He further elaborated: "Among those who dispersed the [1989] April 9 demonstration and killed people were not only Russians... but also Ukrainians, Baltic, Central Asians, and others. It was the Soviet Union."

The prime minister also defended recently adopted amendments to Georgia's Law on Grants, which require government approval for foreign funding of domestic organizations. "If there is anything that this legislation protects, it is precisely, first and foremost, the interests of Georgian society," he said. Civil society organizations have criticized the law as an attempt to defund watchdogs and silence dissent.

Addressing the ongoing crackdown on pro-EU protests, Kobakhidze described most of those arrested as "victims" of propaganda. But he singled out detained journalist Mzia Amaghlobeli, editor of Batumelebi and Netgazeti, accusing her of having a "task — to downgrade the police and insult their dignity."

While advocating for a "humanistic approach" toward young protesters, Kobakhidze emphasized that the law must still be enforced.

In response to Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin's recent statement about restoring diplomatic ties with Georgia, Kobakhidze was firm: "Not to mention anything else, but even legally it is impossible for us to talk about restoring diplomatic relations [with Russia] under occupation."

Finally, he reaffirmed the GD party's antagonistic stance toward parts of the U.S. establishment. According to Kobakhidze, relations with Washington would only improve with the "defeat of the deep state."

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Azerbaijani Journalist Afgan Sadigov Speaks Out After Release



Recently released Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Sadigov has accused the Azerbaijani government of extreme repression, claiming the number of political prisoners in the country has reached 400 and that the regime's brutality has "peaked."

Speaking at a press conference after his release, Sadigov thanked his supporters, including the Georgian media, international partners, and his legal team. He also referenced the assassinations of Azerbaijani dissidents Huseyn Bakikhanov and Bayram Mammadov in Georgia,

stating: "The Azerbaijani authorities should know they may arrest or kill someone, but others will always rise in their place."

Sadigov said his family was repeatedly targeted by the au-

thorities: "Each time I was arrested, they threatened to kill my young

children. I repeatedly appealed to Aliyev, this is my fight, leave my family alone. But dictators never change."

He also drew parallels between the Azerbaijani and Georgian governments, criticizing Georgian Dream party:

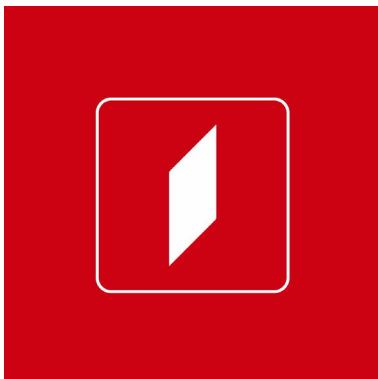
"This is not the dream of the Georgian people. Living in a dictatorship is not their dream. I urge the Georgian authorities to listen to their people, there's no need to follow Putin or Erdoğan. The only right path is to serve the public."

Sadigov claimed he remains at risk in Georgia but said he intends to stay and continue speaking out against authoritarianism.

Addressing the bail imposed on him, he stated:

"I don't accept the bail and won't pay it. Aliyev and Kobakhidze have already bankrupted their countries, I won't contribute to that."

Public Broadcaster Issues Warnings to Three Employees Over Critical Statements



The management of Georgia's Public Broadcaster has issued formal warnings to three more employees over alleged "reputational damage" caused by their public criticism of the channel's editorial direction.

Those sanctioned include

Tukha Kvinikadze, editor of the program Real Space; Ana Abakelia, correspondent of the Weekend Show; and Tamar Jincharauli, the show's executive producer. According to the disciplinary orders, the three are accused of "calling into question the editorial independence and impartiality of the broadcaster through statements disseminated in public space," which management claims resulted in harm to the broadcaster's reputation.

As part of the sanctions, the employees are prohibited from publicly criticizing the broadcaster's editorial policy for a period of 12 months. If they "repeat the violation," they risk dismissal.

Previously, journalists Vasil Ivanov-Chikovani and Nino Zautashvili were fired for similar criticism. Disciplinary measures have also been taken against four employees.

Ozzy is back: act now #ForOurPlanet!

Ozzy is back! The iconic hamster returns this week, urging young people to act #ForOurPlanet.

Over the past years, Ozzy has championed energy-saving tips and renewable energy, starring in two editions of the EU 4Energy comic books, and reaching hundreds of thousands of young people



online and through school visits across the Eastern Partnership countries.

Now, Ozzy is back with a big message, focusing on five easy-to-follow tips that children can understand and apply in their daily lives, recycling and reus-

ing to help protect our planet.

Last Saturday, on World Hamster Day (12 April, did you know...?), Ozzy kicked off his campaign on Instagram with a video highlighting his five tips:

- Swap your things
- Turn off the tap
- Turn off the lights
- Ride a bike
- Use better bulbs

Now, you can find out all about Ozzy's latest efforts on our new dedicated webpage www.euneighbourseast.eu/ozzyforourplanet, featuring all the tips plus practical materials for teaching children how to save energy.

Ozzy will then be teaming up with the Young European Am-

bassadors (YEAs) in the Eastern partner countries, visiting schools and leading interactive activities to raise awareness on the simple actions that can help to save our planet. He will also be attending Europe Day celebrations across the region together with EU4Energy team and the YEAs.

Throughout the coming weeks, Ozzy will also be reaching out to children, parents and teachers on social media on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

So stay tuned and follow Ozzy's lead! #OzzyForOurPlanet #EU4Energy #StrongerTogether (euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Friday, April 18

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 17°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 7°C

Saturday, April 19

Day Mostly Cloudy
High: 19°C

Night Partly Cloudy
Low: 9°C

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